

one

four

three

two

My Mouth Became an 'O' and I Made a Similar Sound
Performed at Kunstverein, Netherlands, 31 May 2019

I struggle to read when someone is talking. When the words I'm reading jar towards the words I'm hearing. When the words I'm hearing hit me as hard as the words I'm reading. I find myself having to give voice to the words; sounding them back to myself as I read or write. Like many I find it difficult to fully digest or compose them under such circumstance, when an unchosen flutter of voices reach and interrupt me. By relaying the words back to myself helps give shape to my conversation; and by my own admission drown out the potentially more interesting conversations in the room.

7th April 2019

Sitting alone in the living room of my one bedroom apartment, I began reading the final chapter of my book. As I reached the end of the first sentence, a pile-driver began to pulse. The vibrations sounding across my entire space; reverberating the floor boards, shivering each of the ten walls that shape my living quarters; the open-plan living room and adjoining kitchen, positioned between a separate bedroom and bathroom.

I left the living room for the bedroom in seek of refuge from the drumming; for it to make next to no difference. In a momentary bid of stubbornness I sat on the edge of my bed trying to focus; to ignore the pounding and to block out the noise, but this effort was short lived. Focus I could not. The words wouldn't sit with me. Even as I read them aloud I struggled. Words written or spoken demand a certain type of silence to be heard and I couldn't hear myself think. Forced out of my private dwelling I left in a huff and took a walk down to my nearest park, passing by the voluptuous hustle and bustle of Chateau Rouge. Navigating past the human traffic flow of the tube exit; checking the tumultuous bike lane; then waiting for the green figure to signal me across the road. I took an uphill walk to Montmartre, after finding an empty bench I sat amongst the chattering of tourists and the chirping of birdsong.

Upon reaching the final full stop of my book, I made my way home and began thinking of silence and its curious relationship between public and private spaces; what is expected of us in these spaces and in exchange what do we expect. How do the architectural patterns modulate our patterns of speech?

The blabbering of the many so often bind together to form a single white noise, words washing into a collective cumulative mush. Places such as cafés, metros, parks, for example. Where the distinction of words or sentences try as they might, so often fail to reach any point of clarity. Sure enough, each of these spaces are closely associated with a certain verbal identity. But in the main for myself, these spaces act as rich habitats to be in the company of words, whether I happen to be in someone's company, reading or heaven forbid trying to write. These sound levels provide a useful framework in speaking, a moment's pause punctuated by the background clatter and chatter of others; taking the weight, volume if you will off the words in conversation.

Recently I've been brought to think that silence is a rather comprehensive and under appreciated vocabulary; a glue to all spoken and written language nestled between words, between letters and not least the insides and outsides of letters. Letters and therefore words need silence as much as they need one another. This apparent vacant space is a necessary lubricant to what renders words discernible, legible and one.

At a young age I was informed by my English teacher that it wasn't so attractive when reading in silence to shape words with my lips. Something unfortunately I still haven't completely surpassed. When confronted with a complicated sentence for example; I find myself announcing it to my fellow commuters on the way to work, or at the very least rearrange my facial features; often furrowing my brow, perhaps squinting, then lip syncing the sentence in a desperate bid to apprehend it.

My partner despite her fluency of the English language is not a native speaker, every so often a turn of phrase, sentence or word escapes me. Unconsciously and rather embarrassingly I attempt to anticipate what she's going to say while ghosting the words she's trying to say, looking something like this [live mouthing] in a hope that by providing some extra shape to the words I can somehow make better sense of them.

As many of you in this room know all too well; I suffer from a somewhat turbulent case of OCD or more aggressively phrased obsessive compulsive disorder; which in the most inconvenient of occasions summons me when leaving my apartment to give voice to various actions. A ritual which I have been practising for many years now.

A habit I would certainly like to kick; but like any bad habit proves itself soothing in the moment. As I flee my apartment I begin to fix and solidify things by speaking aloud. Each action becoming concrete as each word leaves my mouth.

Always starting with the room furthest from the front door. In the case of my apartment, the bedroom;

'shut' I say, to the window,
'off' I say to the radiator,
'off' I say, to the lights in the bedroom, this is the
bedroom complete.

I proceed to the kitchen where I am faced with a more complex set of circumstances;

'shut' I say, to the window,
'off' I say to the cooker, each nob at a time,
off, off, off, off,

I check again, only slower this time,

O	F	F	O	F	F
O	F	F	O	F	F

I then turn my attention round before my eye meets with the cooker again, I turn the lights off to this space.

I then pass through the living room;

'shut' I say, to the window,
'off' I say to the radiator.

I then pass through to the bathroom;

'shut' I say, to the window,
'off' I say to the radiator.
'off' I say to the shower.
'off' I say to the tap.
'off' I say to the light.

I then turn off the lights to the living room, and open the front door; holding my keys in one hand, closing the door with the other, I close,

I turn the key twice; locking both latches, I rotate the key four times, striking the catch each time, on the fourth, like a surgeon I gently remove the key, I immediately place the key into my coat pocket.

'this door is locked' I say,
'one, two, three, four' I say,
Checking the door is locked each time by pulling on the handle.

I repeat;
'this door is locked',
'one, two, three, four'
This can go on for up to two minutes,
possibly three or four.

I sometimes visualise the letters individually to sooth, relax and focus.
Following the loop of the letter round in my head O. Up the leg diagonally meeting the base of the following stem and up to complete the N, and so on.

O N E

T W O

T H R E E

F O U R

When I meet a point of clarity, I turn, exit and leave.